

47:3

Andover Newton Bulletin

Kierkegaard Centennial Issue

G X
K 47
X M 5

FEBRUARY 1955



Issued five times a year in the months of October, December, February, April and June by the Andover Newton Theological School, 210 Herrick Road, Newton Centre 59, Massachusetts. Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Boston, Massachusetts.

Andover Newton Bulletin



FEBRUARY, 1955

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword by the Editor	3
DR. SAMUEL H. MILLER Adjunct Professor of Philosophy and Religion	
Kierkegaard: Then and Now	5
DR. SAMUEL H. MILLER	
Kierkegaard and Abraham	12
DR. WALTER J. HARRELSON Professor of Old Testament	
Kierkegaard and Jeremiah	17
DR. J. LESLIE DUNSTAN Associate Professor of Missions and Comparative Religion	
The Church: Militant or Triumphant?	25
DR. PAUL S. MINEAR Professor of New Testament	
A Pastor Looks at Kierkegaard	32
DR. WALLACE F. FORGEY Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology	
Suggested Reading	38
DR. WALLACE F. FORGEY	

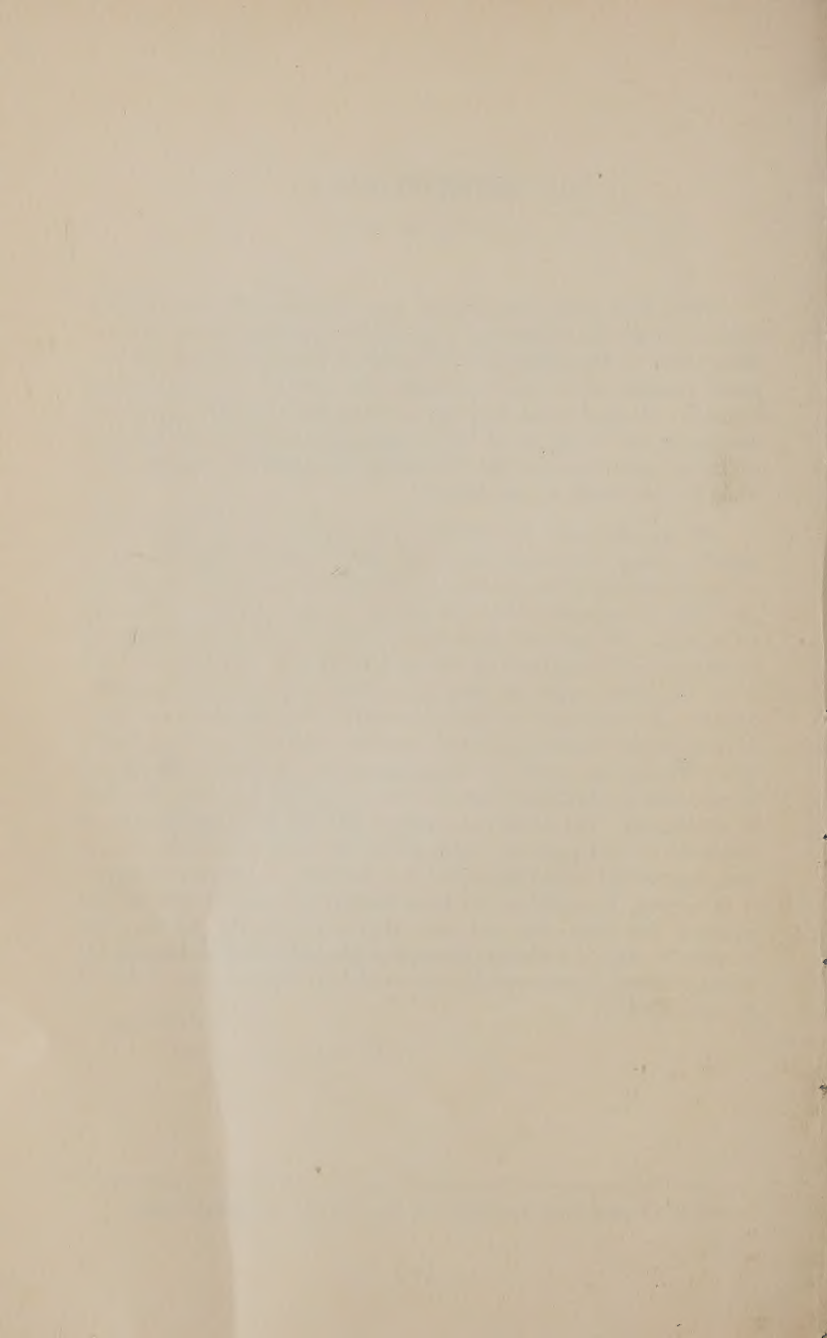
FOREWORD

By SAMUEL H. MILLER

These brief essays are gathered here one hundred years after the death of Søren Kierkegaard as a gesture of gratitude for his life and labor. Born in Denmark in 1813, he raised his voice among the prophetic geniuses of his age to unmask the spiritual crisis confronting mankind. He died at the early age of 42 in the year 1855. No better description can be given of his contribution to the world than that which he himself gave in the concluding paragraph of "The Point of View For My Work As An Author":

"It was the cause of Christianity he served, his life from childhood on being marvelously fitted for such a service. Thus he carried to completion the work of reflection, the task of translating completely into terms of reflection what Christianity is, what it means to become a Christian. His purity of heart was to will only one thing. What his contemporaries complained of during his lifetime, that he would not abate the price, would not give in — this very thing is the eulogy pronounced upon him by after ages, that he did not abate the price, did not give in. But the grand enterprise he undertook did not infatuate him. Whereas as author he had dialectically a survey of the whole, he understood Christianly that the whole signified his own education in Christianity. The dialectical structure he brought to completion, of which the several parts are whole works, he could not ascribe to any man, least of all would he ascribe it to himself; if he were to ascribe it to anyone, it would be to Governance, to whom it was in fact ascribed, day after day and year after year, by the author, who historically died of a mortal disease, but poetically died of longing for eternity, where uninterruptedly he would have nothing else to do but to thank God."¹

¹ Oxford University Press, 1939, pp. 102, 103. Used by special permission.



KIERKEGAARD: THEN AND NOW

By SAMUEL H. MILLER

A hundred years after his death Kierkegaard still remains an enigma to many who have heard his name. Some have been repulsed by the violence of his attack on the church; others by the riddle of his strangely broken engagement; and still others by the wizardry of his philosophizing. Yet for all this, he is not forgotten. Indeed, when his most ruthless strictures on the church are repeated, a gleam of instant recognition comes into the eyes of his most wary and distant observers. When his prayers are said, there is a hush and souls stand against them solidly. When this or that is chosen from the incredible flood of thought and word, and held aloft singly, there is a shining certainty, a light which clarifies the mind in its search through this mortal darkness.

But somehow the whole Kierkegaard is too much! One is apt to get lost in the luxurious undergrowth of brilliant aesthetics in "Either/Or." The profound psychology of "The Concept of Dread" digs so deeply below the cursory quick-flowing surface that we cannot keep our attention on the subtly changing source of sin. Our normal sense of judgment, the pattern of daily acceptance, is thrown out of joint by the radical penetration and intense logic of the "teleological suspension of the ethical" in "Fear and Trembling." The tumbling acrobatics of his dialectical philosophy, now poetic, now religious, bewilder us.

If we can take our eyes off the fluttering leaves we may be able to see the shape of the tree. Kierkegaard himself on several occasions stopped long enough to draw a simple map of his literary journey and to state his fundamental purpose. The question which concerns us here is Kierkegaard's place in the world. If we can discern this, we may be on the way to understanding Kierkegaard, and thus be able to profit by his labor, insight and suffering.

If one takes a quick look at the Nineteenth Century, it is obvious that the foreground is crowded with the drab, sprawling, smoke-belching ramparts of industrialism. Beyond this, flung out in all directions across the world, are the flag-flying armaments of the great nations. But neither the drab squalor nor the fiery fists were the spiritual center of fated portent in that era. Hidden beneath the bluster and the bedlam was a tragic flaw — the source of later catastrophe, the symptom of radical sickness, at once the boast of the age and yet its blindest spot.

This tragic flaw ran through the *free individual*. These two terms point first to the tragic possibilities of a freedom in the sense that a whole culture was uprooted from the ground of tradition. All questions were to be asked within a new perspective and answered without recourse to the stabilizing resources of past wisdom. This violent, radical divorce, this sudden yawning of an abyss in the very ground of time, cannot be exaggerated. From this time on, we had no roots, a condition we proudly boasted as freedom. The second tragic implication was the effect of such freedom on the person. It announced the necessity of the Individual before the person was able to fill the role. As Thomas Mann remarked in his essay on Albrecht Dürer, "The individual was much less individual than we either hoped or feared." This was the person who struggled tragically, painfully, to be the Individual, and yet by his very struggle manifested to himself and others that he was not what he was trying to be. He bore the burden of acting as if he had accomplished the reality, but the weight of its hollowness was heavier than destiny itself.

To be sure individualism had come into its own in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Emerson had dubbed the era that of the first person singular. What had been released in man's being with the coming of the Renaissance was now augmented by many personal and historical forces deepening and enlarging his freedom as a human being. But as so often happens in the course of history, the heightening climax was accompanied by its nemesis. Scarcely had individualism reached the self-conscious stage but challenges and threats arose on every side. For a few, blessed or cursed, as the case may be with prophetic vision, the Individual could be seen standing at the verge of a radical problem.

It was given Kierkegaard to have such penetrating sight. Not only were all his works addressed to the Individual, the Single One as Buber translates his term, but it is on this Individual, the living man, that he elaborates his philosophy, so close to all the joints and gaps of human experience that philosophy itself in the West has been diverted into a new and lively discussion deriving its very name of Existentialism from the field of his intense attention.

That the Individual as such was unsettled by the forces which history released and which the world euphoniously labelled freedom, Kierkegaard knew beyond the peradventure of a doubt. He knew it preeminently in himself, in the tortured sensibilities of his own being. He saw it hidden and repressed below the calm self-deceptions of his fellow men. What he saw plainly and with increasing clarity as time went on, most men either saw not at all, or having seen, turned their eyes to easier sights.

Yet lonely as he must have been in Denmark, Kierkegaard was not alone in the world. The "tragic flaw" of that century had revealed itself elsewhere — to Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne in America; to Feodor Dostoievski in Russia; and to Friedrich Nietzsche in Germany. One scarcely expected that in America, so young and blusteringly invincible, the plight of the Individual would be articulated. Yet there is Ahab in "Moby Dick" (1851), Pierre in the novel by that name (1852) and Bartleby the Scrivener (1856) — all by Melville. And there is Hawthorne's short story of Brand and his analysis of "free" individuals in the Pyncheon family in "The House of Seven Gables" (1851). And in 1852 "Walden" appeared, the work of Thoreau, a genius as crotchety and Kierkegaardian as Kierkegaard himself.

In this same year in Russia Dostoievski was setting down his experiences in the Katorga in Omsk, where he had been exiled. Nowhere is the Kierkegaardian quality of human frustration and boldness more evident than in the first chapter of "Letters From the Underworld" when the common man, a little fellow, stands arms akimbo and curses the regularity of the System and the vast affluence of science. Later novels would explore with clairvoyant accuracy the problem of the "free" Individual in such characters as the Karamazovs, Stavrogin, Raskolnikov and others.

In Germany the crisis had for its mouthpiece the wild, erratic genius of Friedrich Nietzsche. He stated the radical nature of the crisis so ruthlessly that to this day we are loathe to consider his observations seriously. Just as Kierkegaard found that Christendom had abolished Christianity, so Nietzsche, as Camus has recently put it, found God dead in the hearts of his contemporaries. Man as Nietzsche knew him was not the Individual. He was the "bridge" over which man was to cross to the new Man, the true Individual. Nineteenth Century bourgeois man had to be superseded before the Individual would arrive.

Now the amazing thing is that in these instances the analysis is the same. Melville and Hawthorne in the United States, Dostoievski in Russia, Nietzsche in Germany and Kierkegaard in Denmark, all reach the same conclusions in reference to the problem of the Individual. First, they would all say, "Not yet arrived," but having said that they would point out the same factors which were keeping man unsettled, incapable of asserting the reality of the Individual.

The soul of modern man had split into two realms. Once free of stabilizing roots, these two forces expressed themselves in many different social and cultural forms. In man's inner life they shifted the center of gravity in either direction so far that he could no longer keep

his balance. On one side was reason, and on the other sensibility. Externally they were bruited abroad as rationalism and romanticism.

Certainly so announced they seem harmless enough. But the witnesses who studied the situation testify that once reason and sensibility are divorced from each other, each one becomes demonically destructive, and tend to form perverted combinations with each other in greatly augmented force.

Once rationalism becomes a faith, supported by science, empowered by technology, elaborated socially, culturally, politically, aggressively propagated in an age of religious and moral decline, then it becomes obvious that the System (or the State) naturally takes priority over everything. Once romanticism becomes a faith, supported by sentiment, enhanced by ambition, elaborated on a grand scale, cleverly publicized in an age of arid boredom, then it becomes obvious that the Hero — (or the self) takes priority over everything. In both cases the true man is lost.

We know enough about it today to see that reason cut off from sensibility leaves us with science lurching headlong to disaster, without sufficient conscience or defense against the power State. We know that emotions undisciplined by reason tend to create a public tyranny more awful than that of despots. We have seen the twin streams of such perverted power coming down from Hegel the Rationalist and Nietzsche the Romanticist, joined in the deadly compact of Hitler and his clever fiends.

Kierkegaard fully recognizes the inadequacy and the danger of this split man. Both paths lead to despair. And despair bears fruit in the frenzied boredom of our present state. But fighting on both fronts, Kierkegaard nevertheless leaves modern man unhealed. The question is, How can we become one? We cannot excommunicate either our reason or our sensibilities. The aesthetic and the rational are undeniable portions of man's nature. To deny them entrance to the realm of spirit is so severe a judgment as to leave us with little else in the way of being human. The resolution of the inner schism, on which depends our becoming Individuals, was not effected by Kierkegaard.

Moreover the very violence of his struggle to save the Individual resulted in overshooting the mark. So sharply does he cut him off from his fellows that the Single One tends to become an arbitrary fiction. In brief, Kierkegaard mistook the ego for the self. There is a we-ness to the I fundamental to its reality which Kierkegaard never understood. Shocked by the absorption of the Individual by the Crowd, he failed to distinguish between the Crowd and the Community. The

truth is, the Individual is not enhanced by the destruction of Community, nor is the Community strengthened by diminishing the Individual. What happens is that with the weakening, or unsettling, of the Individual the Community also declines. With the collapse of the Community, paralleled by the free-frustrated Individual, the State appears in its place, quickly growing to vast artificial proportions to meet the desperate necessity of coercing the semblance of order where vital cohesion does not exist. This is our modern condition. The crisis of the West is that we have produced the Individual at the very juncture when Society itself has been loosened to such a degree that the artificial pressures of the State seem necessary to keep the social order in shape. Russia is an extreme example. Failing to create Community, she has fabricated out of powerfully demonic forces a State to fill the vacuum. One can only judge the terrible dissolution of social ties, the vast hole in the soul of the people, by the massiveness and intricacy of arbitrary power and machinery of the State.

Kierkegaard seen against his own age suffers the split consciousness which both marks the Individual and frustrates him. On two counts he fails to resolve the problem, first by not reconciling either the aesthetic sensibility or the rational ethic to the integrity of the Individual, and secondly by the severity of devaluing the social as though it did not share in the core of the Individual's reality. That he saw clearly where the crisis lay, analyzed it brilliantly, and in season and out of season maintained an aggressive campaign to conserve the reality of the Individual is of course plain.

Nietzsche, declaring that God was dead, went on to construct a man who would take over God's prerogatives, while Kierkegaard, seeing how deadly the relationship with God had become, plunged behind it to recover the real connection between God and man which Christendom had blurred. This was not mere conservatism. It was anthropological insight and realism. To be whole, the Individual needed not only integrity in the sense of a rational-romantic unity, but also a true tie with transcendence. So lost had this become in that immanent epoch that there was little to choose between the rationalists like Hegel and the romanticists like Nietzsche. They had managed to flatten reality to an unreal single level, and to eliminate from man the central core of Individuality, namely transcendence. Unfortunately Kierkegaard allowed little else to man except the relationship with God, and this in such terms that God became all and man a problematic cipher. It is not strange that the Barthian extreme should have taken its rise in Kierkegaard.

Let us now ask what Kierkegaard's place is in our own age. Obviously Kierkegaard has not changed but perhaps the world has.

We have passed through several cataclysms of war and are now living in an uncertain peace. Some things which were not very plain in the mid-Nineteenth Century have been illustrated by lightning-like flashes. We have seen for instance what the phantom-public could become in sadistic deviltry. We have borne the terror which romanticism and reason concocted with its incredible cruelty. We are beginning to discern how the levelling of society is not a guarantee of greater justice or firmer peace, but perhaps only of a new kind of tyranny. Science has been shaken by a shame borne of the uses to which its power and skill have been put. If the Individual is heir to a chaos of undisciplined emotions and loose sentiments, fanatical forces in the State hysterically drive and cow the insecure or the bold from making any deviations from the vague but arbitrary norm. The chaos and the deviltry are much plainer today than in Kierkegaard's time.

That this is so may be illustrated by a comparison of the fantasies of our age with those of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. The predictions then were exuberantly optimistic, extremely Utopian in the acquired sense of that term. Today the outlook is drear indeed. One needs only to read Orwell's "1948," Huxley's "Brave New World," Capek's "R. U. R.," or Camus' "The Stranger."

The testimony of these witnesses is that there is an Evil in our world as terrifying and as seductive as any man has ever known. Kierkegaard still remains pertinent at the point where we can see the evil but have not sight or insight to trace it to its origins in the perverted combinations of reason and romanticism.

Moreover, Kierkegaard still has a prophetic mission to perform for the Church. For certain portions of the Church which have been through the ordeal of local terror and total war the message of Kierkegaard is quite intelligible. But generally in the United States we are strangely blind to two things. First we do not know that "freedom" separated us violently from the Christian ground of truth and tradition, and in this "freedom" there was subsequently insinuated a whole new set of virtues and mores which have as yet not been redeemed or civilized. Secondly, we still do not see the divorce of reason and sensibility as a fundamental crisis of significance. We continue to play both ends for all they are worth, the former in a popular kind of pragmatism where the church, its worship, and all religious activities are judged by quantitative criteria of commerce, and the latter in an equally popular kind of respectability forever fenced off and isolated from the shattering questions of guilt, salvation, death, and God's judgment and grace. There is a vast area of the American church still slumbering in a prosperous and comfortable naivete, unable as yet to

recognize how radically Christianity has been covered up and hidden from sight by modernized substitutes of the same name.

Finally, Kierkegaard has a place in our time at the point where transcendence must be recovered. This is not an academic question or a theological quibble. Unless transcendence, the sign of the Living God, is recovered, there is no reality dimension open for the Individual. All his relationships are threatened by unreality, and only by violence can he maintain the semblance of Society or action. The modern western world, including Russia, will be without the Individual and Community, if it fails to recover the revelation of God.

Kierkegaard's destiny is linked irrevocably with the crisis of our age. There is no confusion about the one without confusion about the other. Ultimately the question of whether the West can create a Community to sustain the Individual, both bearing such tremendous burdens of freedom, will depend on whether sufficient transcendence can be revealed. Put into concrete terms, this means that Christianity must be recovered in its primal power if the Community and the Individual are to survive. Kierkegaard has not solved the problem, but he has made it impossible for us to forget it.



KIERKEGAARD AND ABRAHAM

By WALTER J. HARRELSON

"A marvelous essay of passion and profundity — but by no means is it a treatment of Abraham as the Old Testament knows him." This is the judgment which has often been expressed by biblical scholars and others with regard to S. K.'s *Fear and Trembling*. On one level it is obviously a sound judgment. Johannes de silentio is not engaged in traditional exegesis of the Old Testament text. This is "a dialectical lyric," not a commentary upon Genesis 22. At the same time, *Fear and Trembling*, as a dialectical lyric, is firmly rooted in the story recounted in the biblical passage. The author has not merely taken this ancient story as a point of departure; he has remained with it. S. K.'s theme is the nature of faith in general, and of biblical faith in particular. He deals with the details of the story with faithfulness and scrupulousness. There is no allegory, no poetic license in evidence. While it is no doubt true that the author's personal tragedy is reflected in the work, the issue is not personal but perennial: what is the nature of the relationship between God and man which is referred to by the term 'faith'?

In this brief note there will be no attempt to deal with all the references in S. K.'s works to Abraham; only *Fear and Trembling* is to be considered, and this work only in reference to the figure of Abraham. It may be, however, that what is said here will be of value in the study of S. K.'s general method of biblical interpretation.

I. S. K.'s attention to details of the biblical tradition of Abraham

In the "Panegyric" the author skillfully summarizes the faith-element in the whole saga of Abraham: his departure for an unknown land, his acceptance of the Promise, his steadfastness as he and Sarah grow old without an heir. Then the Promise is fulfilled, Isaac is born, grows up in the tent of these ancient parents. And now appears the temptation, the preposterous testing of a man already tried beyond human endurance: "And God tempted Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham, Abraham, where art thou?" ("Where art thou?" is missing in the Hebrew text but is clearly presupposed by the reply of Abraham. Some MSS read "Abraham, Abraham"; others have the name only once.)

There follows a set of excerpts from the story which show the author's attention to specific details: Abraham's silence, his refusal to plead or to doubt; his rising early in the morning, with no delay; his gathering of the wood, his refusal to divulge his destination or its meaning to Sarah or Eleazar. Later on S. K. mentions additional details:

Abraham arrived neither too soon nor too late (p. 47); the ass is a slow beast, the journey lasted for three days (p. 75); only once does Abraham speak, in reply to Isaac (p. 180). There are only two instances in which S. K. seems to have misunderstood details of the story, or deliberately to have altered them: in his reference to the three and a half days (in one instance, p. 77) and in his reference to the mountain by the name "Moriah," an identification made in the Book of Chronicles (II Chr. 3:1). In all other instances he is scrupulously precise in his dealing with the received tradition.

These observations might be considered trivial if it were not for the fact that S. K. is often accused of having taken great liberties with the biblical texts, of employing them to his own poetic uses. In the particular instance such a charge is without foundation. On the contrary, his suggestions as to how Abraham might have acted (in doubt, in which case he would have taken his own life on the mountain, p. 26; with infinite resignation, in which case he would say, All is lost in this world, but perhaps there is hope in the age to come, p. 46; in haste, out of his passionate love for God, in which case he would have immediately sacrificed Isaac without making the long journey to the mountain, p. 49; in fear of an angry deity, in which case his action would indeed have been meeting the ethical requirement, but not that of faith, p. 88) demonstrate that the received story is taken with utmost seriousness. It is also clear that the author assumes the trustworthiness of the biblical account, not surely in some merely factual sense, but as an actual tradition to be received as a faithful record of old Israel: "Or perhaps he (Abraham) did not do at all what is related, but something altogether different, which is accounted for by the circumstances of his times — then let us forget him, for it is not worth while to remember *that* past which cannot become a present" (p. 38). We conclude, therefore, that whatever liberties S. K. may have taken with the Abraham tradition, these are of a different order than those taken by a poet freely using ancient records for his own aesthetic or religious purposes. His work is designed as a "dialectical lyric" the subject of which is Abraham, Abraham as depicted in the Old Testament records.

II. S. K.'s analysis of the faith of Abraham

The theme of the writing is faith — faith in general, but in particular biblical faith as revealed in the story of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son. S. K.'s polemic against the Hegelian philosophy and its Christianized form in his own day is well known and requires no comment here. This is of course the background against which his analysis of faith must constantly be viewed. He is insisting upon the reality of the particular, the existing individual as over against the

universal. The particular, the individual must have an absolute relation to the absolute if the tyrannical claim of the universal is to be overcome. This thought is developed in Problem II, "Is there such a thing as an absolute duty toward God?" and in a somewhat different way in Problem I, "Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?" Now it may be that S. K. is here making the problem more difficult than it actually is because of the seriousness with which he takes the Hegelian categories. This is not the problem with which I wish to deal. My question is simply this: has S. K. correctly or incorrectly stated the dimensions and the depth of biblical view of faith?

For our author, faith involves a dialectical movement, the first stage of which is infinite resignation. Here the tragic hero and Abraham are in complete agreement. The claim of God is absolute; to it one bends in resignation. What God (or the gods) has (have) decreed, to this man submits. But this infinite resignation is not easily attained; the tragic hero arrives at this position through agony and tears and finally he is ready to fulfill the deity's command. (Agamemnon and Iphigenia illustrate this position, as do Jephthah and his daughter). This, however, is only the first movement, a movement which indeed has a different quality for him who is ready to make the second. The second movement alone deserves the term faith. Abraham makes the movement of infinite resignation, but not with tears and pleading. For dialectically related to the first is the second, the movement of faith. Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his son, but even so he believes that God will not require him. He is astonished when his faith is fulfilled and Isaac is returned to him, but is nonetheless overjoyed at the result; the tragic hero, on the contrary, would be embarrassed to receive back the gift which he has prepared himself to offer to the deity.

S. K. has a term for this movement of faith: it is a movement made "by virtue of the absurd." Humanly speaking, it is ridiculous to believe that God will not in fact require Isaac. Why then should he be summoned to offer him? Is God merely playing a game? Faith is possible only when there is an absolute relation to the absolute — that is, when the individual is ready to offer, not merely himself, but all which he holds dear to God. The biblical term for this relationship is clearly faith. Faith involves a total dependence upon a faithful God. The gods may be loved for their beauty, the glory of their creations, the splendor of their promises. One might love God and yet not have faith — that is, not stake one's life upon His faithfulness. In Habakkuk 2:4 the most natural meaning of the expression "the just shall live in his faithfulness" is that the righteous man (the tsaddiq) lives wholly and completely only on the bedrock of assurance that God is faithful.

He can be relied upon, His promise, His purpose stand sure, despite all appearance.

Is this what S. K. means by the term "absurd"? Perhaps not. If not, then we may be justified in concluding that, despite the power and glory of his treatment of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, he has not been entirely faithful to the depth of meaning in the biblical term. But let us not be too hasty to come to this conclusion. The remarkable picture of the knight of faith in the "Preliminary Expectoration" (pp. 52-57 in particular) is worth close analysis. Here called the knight of the infinite, the man is described as absolutely undistinguishable from other men. "Why, he looks like a tax-collector!", one would say upon learning his identity. He is completely a man of this world, with not a single distinguishing mark. He is no genius, is interested in all things, lives a carefree life but "buys up the acceptable time at the dearest price." He has renounced all things and yet finds pleasure and delight in every finite thing. "He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd."

Is this the picture of the biblical man of faith? Surely it is a faithful picture of Abraham. What Old Testament personality more adequately fits this description? An earthy man, subject to human temptations, desiring wealth and a good meal, anxious about a child and concerned for the right wife for him, intent to demonstrate his hospitality. And yet, all his treasures are held loosely: Lot may choose any part of the land he desires; the booty of war means nothing to him; the fate of his beloved nephew is left entirely in God's hands when fire and brimstone are about to rain down upon the nephew's home city. "He believed God and God reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Nor are there other biblical examples lacking. The whole picture of Jesus is one in which such "absurd" faith is over and again disclosed. Paul's words belong within the same framework: "We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (II Cor. 6:8-10); see also Phil. 3:7-8 and I Cor. 1-2.

The offense in this notion of faith by virtue of the absurd must be recognized. It is not to be cheaply overcome by the claim that faith is supra-rational, trans-rational, thus providing one "level" for reason and a higher "level" for faith. The absolute relation to the absolute is incommensurable with that of the particular to the universal. Faith is not a higher reason; it is reason of a different order.

Just here I feel impelled to state a certain uneasiness with S. K.'s use of the term "absurd." The knight of faith lives every moment by virtue of the absurd. But this clearly means that a new dimension of life has taken possession of him (as S. K.'s example alluded to above makes clear) which has transformed his total being. The decisions reached, then, at a given time and place are not unrelated to the totality of his being. When Abraham grasps everything by virtue of the absurd, when he believes that, despite the command of God, Isaac will be returned to him, he is not performing an isolated act of faith. The dramatic intensity of this single act could lead one to conclude that the knight of faith is here in some unique way demonstrating his faithfulness. This is incorrect and dangerous. The quiet burial of Sarah in the cave, the deathbed scene in which Elieazar is despatched to secure a wife for Isaac, the simple walk back to Mamre when Sodom is about to fall — all these equally demonstrate the faithfulness of Abraham. I believe that S. K. intends us to understand the "absurd" in this way, but clearly this is not how his view has been received. The "leap" of faith is frequently described in much more cataclysmic, traumatic terms, as though faith were attained only in crisis. Dependence upon the faithfulness of God, however, is a mode of existence for every day and time.

This leads to a final observation. There is a kind of confirmation of the faithfulness of God which human history discloses — precisely in faith. After all, Isaac and Abraham do rejoin the two young men at the foot of the mountain. Ahaz lives to see the faithfulness of God, in the strength of which Isaiah lives, vindicated, although he may not acknowledge this vindication. God's faithfulness receives its token confirmations which in their turn elicit dependence upon God's faithfulness. And this interior confirmation of faith is apprehended by the whole man — as reasoning animal and as believer. This means for me that the "absurd" takes on a new quality in the life of the man and the people of faith. It is built into the very fabric of the life of the believer and of the believing people of God. While the believer may come to discover the incommensurability of faith and all human reckoning, at the same time he comes to know the reasonableness of the "absurd." "The heart has its reason which the reason cannot know."

The point of the above observations is this: S. K. is a careful and sensitive analyst of the Bible. His analysis of the person and faith of Abraham are here held to be essentially sound and faithful to the biblical story and to the terms of biblical faith. Faith "by virtue of the absurd" is a dangerous way of speaking, but all helpful thinking is dangerous.

KIERKEGAARD AND JEREMIAH

By J. LESLIE DUNSTAN

Jeremiah's public ministry, after more than twenty years, had been brought to a complete stop by King Jehoiakim who ordered him barred from the temple and from popular gatherings. Jeremiah had been faithfully interpreting God's will to the people, but the King found him a most dangerous agitator and a perverter of the nation's morale. In the circumstances of the time the King could not allow such a person his freedom. Silenced in this way, Jeremiah wrote the story of his life; he dictated to Baruch "all the words God had spoken to him from the days of Josiah until that day" (36:2), and Baruch transcribed on a scroll that which Jeremiah said.

This was no idle exercise on Jeremiah's part, done for his own interest or the possibility that through the written story he might be remembered and honoured. It was a serious attempt to circumvent the royal order and present his message once more to the people, "that every one may turn from his evil way" (36:7). He had spent his years trying to win his people back to a true allegiance to their God, but his efforts had met with little response. He could only try again. And so he wrote his story, often transposing his words from the setting in which he uttered them to the contemporary situation, often putting interpretations on descriptions of experiences, often telling of an episode as though it had been perfectly clear to him when doubtless it had not been, often adding words that came from a later view of an event, and when he had finished he sent Baruch to read it to the crowd in the temple, hoping they would "hear all the evil God intends to do to them and turn from their evil ways that God may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (36:3). Jeremiah's autobiography is a sermon addressed to the people of his day.

In the year 1848 Kierkegaard came to what seemed to him a time of crucial decision. Five years before, he had published "Either/Or" under the name of Victor Eremita. During the years which followed he produced "two philosophical works, five aesthetic works, and fifteen religious books containing seventy-five discourses" (L. 391); he had become engaged to Regina Olsen and had broken the engagement in tragic fashion; and he had become involved in an encounter with the "Corsair" which had made him the object of public ridicule. That, in brief, was the story of his life.

Then "another idea became quite clear to me, that if it was really to be the Exceptional then I might be required to step forward in

character" (J. 1294). Up to that point Kierkegaard had tried, through his writing "to be a religious author . . . (whose work) was related to Christianity, to the problem of becoming a Christian" (PV. 5). He was convinced that his contemporaries were not Christians even though they thought otherwise, and he sought through his work to make them aware of their true condition. He had, however, gone about this job by indirection, publishing his books under other names, believing that by this method he might startle people into thought about themselves. He had kept his own part in the literary production hidden not only because that was his chosen technique but also because "he considered silence his religious duty" (PV. 5). The "new idea which became clear to him" required him to change his method and at the same time make plain to the public what he had earlier been about. He felt that he must "as directly and frankly as possible . . . declare what he as an author was" (PV. 5). And so he wrote "The Point of View for My Work as an Author." The book is not in any real sense an autobiography; it is a setting down of the purpose which he had held, of how he came to have that purpose, and of how he had sought to realize it. The book is "a direct communication; a report to history" (PV. Title).

Yet the book was much more than a personal accounting prepared so that Kierkegaard would get credit for the work he had done. It was a continuation of and, if you will, the climax of the task he had been at all the while. As he had worked he had kept his eyes on "the individual" for he knew that real decisions for the service of God are not made by people en masse, but that each person must decide for himself. Through "The Point of View" he sought to make quite clear to "that individual, whoever he was, wherever he was and whatever his name might be" (PV. 111) exactly what he had been doing so that there might be no misunderstanding. Perchance, also, through the little book other individuals might be awakened to their condition. In the hour when Kierkegaard shifted his standpoint and launched out upon a new task, he tried by giving a public accounting of his life and writing to further the purpose for which he had worked. (The fact that "The Point of View" was not published until after Søren Kierkegaard's death does not alter this estimate of the aim he had when he wrote the manuscript.)

Kierkegaard kept a Journal for a number of years, in which the story in "The Point of View" has its parallels. Baruch, Jeremiah's intimate friend, kept a diary which both supplements and repeats the record which the prophet prepared. But the important thing is that both men thought that by writing accounts of their lives they were carrying forward the purpose which they had tried to achieve.

Both men came early in their lives to a realization of God's living presence and the knowledge that for them a relationship to God was of utmost and supreme importance. Jeremiah felt that God had picked him out "before he was born and appointed him to be a prophet" (1:15). Kierkegaard said that he "was predisposed from his earliest childhood . . . to become exactly the kind of author he became" (PV. 76); he was "relegated to himself and to a relationship to God" (PV. 76). Both men were deeply conscious of a separation between themselves and their contemporaries; they had been called out, as it were, and set apart from their fellows; they felt their isolation and their loneliness; and they wished they might in some way be in harmony with the rest of men, "live in immediacy" as Kierkegaard expressed it. But such was not for them. God was the authority over them and to His commands they had to respond.

There are grounds in the lives of both men for suggesting that their consciousness of God's reality was the product of their training and environment. Jeremiah's father was the priest of a local shrine and his brothers shared in the sacred duties. He early learned the story of his nation and of the covenant which had been made with God. He grew aware of the contradiction between the lives of those about him and the requirements of that covenant. He became acquainted with the work of the prophets and their messages; especially he pondered the story of Hosea, finding in that earlier fellow-countryman a nature akin to his own. All those experiences were bound to create in Jeremiah's mind a knowledge of God and in his heart the burden of God's claim upon His people.

Kierkegaard was brought up in a home where God was looked upon as the all-powerful, stern Lord of the universe. He was early introduced by his father to Christianity and was told with special emphasis the story of Jesus' trial and death; he was allowed to listen as his father and an occasional visitor talked about religion; and he was taught that one of the greatest obligations resting upon him was to obey. "As a child I was sternly and seriously brought up in Christianity" (PV. 76). He was aware that even though his father appeared thoroughly religious some dark shadow hung over him, and this awareness accentuated the religious training he received. "The most dangerous case is . . . when the father is a pious and God-fearing man, when the child is inwardly and deeply convinced of it, and yet in spite of all this observes that a deep unrest is hidden in his soul so that not even piety and the fear of God can bestow peace" (Quote L. 50. See J. 1055). Kierkegaard, in his home, was literally trained in a God relationship.

Yet this explanation for the clear sense of God's presence in the lives of both men will not suffice. Wherever their awareness of God came from, and certainly the training they received during their early years had much to do with it, they both had to assent to God's reality in their actions. Each of them describes the way in which this came about.

Jeremiah heard God call him to be a prophet. He protested because of his youthfulness and his inability to speak. But God reassured him on both those points and then went on to describe in some detail the role he had to play. The God of whom he had learned laid a special task upon him. Kierkegaard realized when he was a young man that the kind of person he was and the kinds of interests and abilities he possessed were signs of God's will for him. "There are two thoughts which were so early in my soul that I cannot discover their origin. The first is that there are men whose qualification it is to be sacrificed in one way or another . . . in order to put forward an idea — and the second is that with my particular cross I was such a man" (J. 1294). "How true it is that I have been given a task which God Himself allotted to me" (J. 744). The God of whom Kierkegaard had been taught called him to a special work.

Both men acknowledged God's reality by responding to the demands He made upon them, but they differed from each other in those responses. Jeremiah agreed to be a prophet and then decided for himself the work he should do and the results he might expect. He based his activities upon his own reaction to events and his own judgment of his contemporaries. He accepted God's will for him and then interpreted that will as he chose. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, understood almost from the beginning what God's will for him was, but he refused to obey." . . . if ever I become seriously Christian I shall be ashamed of not having done so before, of having wished to try everything else first" (J. 174). One man did not wait for God to show him the task that was his; he made up the task himself. The other man knew what God required, but was not willing at the outset to accept that requirement.

This difference between the two men shows in the suffering each had to bear. Jeremiah's early ministry brought him opposition, persecution, ridicule and the threat of death; and he was nonplussed and incensed. He could not understand why this had happened. He had accepted a task from God; he had carried out that task as well as he knew how; the failure was not his fault. Clearly, God had played false with him. "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, . . . Thou art stronger than I and Thou hast prevailed . . . for the word of the Lord has

become for me a reproach and a derision all day long" (20:7-8). "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I complain to Thee; yet I would plead my case before Thee" (12:1). Jeremiah's suffering was the inner agony of one who felt himself unjustly treated, yet he did not at that point in his life see the connection between his own self-determined program and his pain.

Contrariwise, Kierkegaard's suffering came as a result of his refusal to do as he knew God required. One aspect of that suffering was the feeling of deep guilt which resulted from his behaviour; years passed before that feeling was lifted. The other aspect of his suffering was the fear that God would leave him. He had refused to obey God's will for him; God might properly and justly turn away from him. One of the prayers (this is a noteworthy parallel to Jeremiah, who out of his suffering turned to God in prayer) which he put down in his Journal has these words in it: "Father in heaven! Avert Thy countenance from me no longer, let it once again shine upon me that I may walk in Thy path . . . O let Thy voice come unto me, be heard by me even though it overtake me with terror on the wrong path . . . O Thou, my Lord Jesus Christ . . . look Thou for me in the path of my errors" (J. 310). His was the suffering of one who feared he would be treated justly.

On an objective appraisal the two men must be considered failures. Jeremiah lived during the final years of the Hebrew kingdom and shared in the sorrows and hardships and horror of Jerusalem's destruction. He tried to get the people to repent of their evil, but they would not listen. He advised the King as to the action which should be taken, and the King did exactly the opposite. He counselled the soldiers to surrender to the enemy, and the soldiers chose to continue the useless battle and be defeated. He urged the murderers of the governor to remain in Jerusalem, but they fled to Egypt taking him with them. At no point in his career was there an affirmative response to his efforts. Kierkegaard, on Goldsmith's testimony (L. 352), is to be credited with bringing about his resignation from the editorship of the "Corsair"; but at a terrible price to Kierkegaard and the people of Denmark. Aside from that there is no other success to record. His engagement to Regina was a sorry failure; his attack upon the church had no immediate effect; his books, with the exception perhaps of "Either/Or," were not understood and did not have an extensive sale; and he wore himself out in his efforts. Both were men whose accomplishments in the world were practically negligible.

Yet such an objective judgment is completely and wholly wrong. Both men achieved, to a pre-eminent degree, the tasks which were theirs. The essential, fundamental aspect of both their lives was their

relationship to God. They knew that relationship at the beginning, they held fast to it and they followed as it led them through all that happened. At times that relationship required them to act; at other times it required them to bear the reaction of their contemporaries and the effect of events. Both of them were tempted to give up the relationship, Jeremiah by going to the solitude of the desert and Kierkegaard by taking a country pastorate, but neither succumbed to those temptations. They held fast to their places before God and grew certain that the true significance of every experience lay in their God relationship, in the demands God made upon them and the concern God showed for them. Their lives cannot be judged by the impact they had upon the affairs of their day; rather they must be measured by their faithfulness to God's living presence.

Through their relationship to God both men came to know three aspects of God's dealing with those who serve Him. First, they learned that God uses the events and experiences through which men pass for their training and education. "God is infinite love in this too, that He does not suddenly and all at once fall upon a man and demand that he should be spirit . . . No, He takes hold so gently, it is a long operation, an education . . . " (J. 1242). "What would you say to a man who should say, God in heaven is my teacher . . . it was He who taught me" (J. 401). Kierkegaard expressed himself in that way. Jeremiah's testimony is different although it points to the same truth. Not long after he started his ministry he found the opposition and lack of response most disheartening and he protested to God; God replied that the trials he had undergone were as nothing compared to the trials he would have to face. And later on when he asked God to wreck vengeance upon those who sought to do him evil, God told him to look inside himself and wipe out the evil in his own heart before judging others. The lives of both men were molded and changed by the experiences through which they passed.

Second, both men received from God a full measure of inner power and certainty. Let Kierkegaard speak first: "God gives my life of pain a significance which almost overwhelms me, gives me good fortune and strength and wisdom for all my achievement in making my life the pure expression of idea" (J. 754). "I shall forever remember how infinitely much more Providence has done for me than I ever had expected, could have expected, or might have dared to expect" (PV. 154). Jeremiah did not describe what took place in his life but the evidence is clear. As a young man he was emotional, unstable and uncertain; he became a man of unshakable certainty and fearless rectitude. Such was the change which God wrought in him. Through the

training God gave He nurtured and developed the spiritual lives of the two men.

Then, third, both men were used by God in the achievement of His purpose; they became tools in God's hands for making clear the true character of the societies in which they lived. Israel was faithful in its attendance at the temple, in the celebration of the feasts and in its acknowledgment of God's lordship; Denmark was a Christian nation with all the customs and traditions of Christendom. Both nations appeared to be thoroughly religious. Jeremiah and Kierkegaard became, through their God relationship, men who revealed by their lives and the reaction of their fellows to them the true character of their times. Both men became the objects of public anger and abuse. And by their willingness to accept at God's behest all that the populace did to them they made clear what that populace was really like. Kierkegaard was "cast as a sacrifice before the insurrection of vulgarity" and was "condemned almost as a criminal when there was not the least trace of the scoundrel or rascal in what I did" (PV, 95). Jeremiah was pilloried, scorned, put on trial and thrown into a dungeon. Judah was condemned by the evil which became apparent in its treatment of the prophet and Denmark was condemned by the vulgarity and mass-mindedness made clear in its dealing with Kierkegaard.

The two men have left us, among other things, one clear word. The last recorded episode in Jeremiah's life tells the story. He and his close friend Baruch were on the road to Egypt. They had not wanted to go and they knew that no good would result from their enforced journey. Evening had come and the two men were alone in their tent. Baruch, in sorrowful anger, poured out his feelings and his thoughts; to him life was a painful weary business about which God did precisely nothing. In his complaining he almost cursed God. When he grew quiet Jeremiah answered. "Let God care for the rise and fall of nations. Do not be ambitious for yourself and thus disappointed when your ambitions are frustrated. Just be sure of one thing: God gives you your life, and the possibility of a living relationship between yourself and Him. That relationship is the centre of man's existence and the only thing that counts. So accept your life from God's hands and serve Him in all you do" (paraphrase of 45:4-5).

And Kierkegaard adds his voice to that of the ancient prophet. "The individual is the category through which, in a religious respect, this age, all history, the human race as a whole, must pass" (PV, 130 also, J. 723). He was sure that in his day and in all ways "God must be the decisive factor." But if God is to become the decisive factor then the individual, man as a person all by himself, must make Him that.

For "to God as the decisive factor corresponds the individual" (PV. 136).

Both say to us and to all men that God is the supreme and great Reality before Whom we must live and that each one of us all by himself must so live by means of a personal choice.

Notes: Passage references are to the Book of Jeremiah.

L. refers to Walter Lowrie's *Kierkegaard*; the number is the page.

J. refers to the *Journals*, selected and edited by Alexander Dru.

The number refers to the number of the entry.

PV. refers to *The Point of View* and gives page reference.



THE CHURCH: MILITANT OR TRIUMPHANT?

By PAUL S. MINBAR

At this mid century we must number Søren Kierkegaard among our most influential contemporaries. This is true whether one is dealing with atheists, with Jews, with Catholics or with Protestants; it is true whether one has in view the realms of aesthetics, metaphysics, ethics or dogmatics. Catholic and Protestant writers vie with one another in their claims that he belongs to them. Herein lies a remarkable irony. This irrepressible Dane who is so aggressively courted by both groups launched against both an attack which, in my judgment, is more devastating than any other in the modern age. Western culture has certainly had its quota of Voltaires and Nietzsches, but no other critic of Christendom has planned his attack more carefully or launched it more adroitly than Kierkegaard. It was in the midst of this attack and as a result of it that Kierkegaard died just a century ago. In this essay we will glance first at the central thrust of his polemic and then appraise a few of its therapeutic effects.

Although S. K.'s assault upon the Church of Denmark had long been brewing, the public storm itself covered less than eleven months. The offensive was launched mainly through two series of published essays. From December 18, 1854, to May 26, 1855, he contributed twenty-one explosive articles to the newspaper *Fatherland*. Then, from May 24 until September 24, appeared a series of nine independent pamphlets under the title *The Instant*. Interspersed with these two series were various sheets and broadsides, all designed to awaken the widest possible hearing to "The Judgment of Christ on Official Christianity." (In English these appear under the title *Attack Upon 'Christendom,'* Princeton, (1944.) It was while he was preparing the tenth issue of *The Instant* that the author fell ill. Recovering for a brief period, he returned to the battle, but on October 2 his campaign was halted for good when he fainted in the street. He lingered on in the hospital until November 11. In one sense, his death at the age of 42 terminated his struggle; in another sense it marked the real beginning. To him the attack upon the Danish church was an assignment from God which he could not evade. It was the culmination of his tutelage under Christ, the final examination in God's school. He was confident that God's controversy with His people would not end with this single episode, yet he did not speculate concerning what course the future battles would take. It was sufficient for him to follow God's governance, however obnoxious to him the assignments might be. "Christendom certainly needs a jolt of this kind . . . I shall succeed in

administering it . . . This is the greatest thing, humanly speaking, which can come of my life" (Journals, 1849, as quoted in Jolivet, *Introduction to Kierkegaard*, p. 34).

What was this jolt? Simply the charge that Christendom had abolished Christianity. In contrast to Luther's 95 theses S. K. had but one: Christianity no longer exists. Here we must take note that it was not Christianity which S. K. attacked, but Christendom. And the criterion which he consistently used for distinguishing the true Christianity from the advertised brand was the New Testament. Appealing to this standard, he contended that the State Church resembled the Church of the apostles no more than "a quadrangle resembles a circle" (*Training in Christianity*, p. 207).

True Christianity is always militant; the official version claims to be triumphant. The former is heterogeneous to the world; the latter homogeneous. The former is hated by the world, yet content to participate in the sufferings of the Crucified; the latter, pampered and domesticated by the world, is content only with prosperity and prestige. To the former discipleship means total renunciation and radical insecurity; to the latter, steady advancement in popular applause and financial position. The militant church is composed of genuine followers of Christ; the triumphant church, of aesthetic admirers. According to the New Testament the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ are inseparable; not so, today, Modern Christendom advertises a shortcut to the glory which by-passes the suffering. It has ceased to suffer on earth yet it claims the eternal glory that comes only through such suffering. It has introduced triumph into the temporal world where it does not belong. By setting an objective of temporal power, Christendom has replaced God's definition of Christianity as found in the New Testament by its own pleasant dream of a church acclimated to a Christian state, a Christian culture, a Christian world. This is nothing short of robbery, the theft from God of His rights over the Church.

This robbery, of course, takes place in so subtle a fashion that the thieves themselves are deceived. In Christendom, we are all Christian as a matter of course, without needing to know what Christianity actually is. The illusion that we are already believers prevents us from becoming believers. Before we can hear the gospel aright we must first be shown that we are now heathen, but that is something we cannot admit. It is much easier for heathen to grasp and respond to the gospel than for us. Christendom has thus successfully immunized the whole population against Christianity. A tiny dose of true Christianity, mixed with an enormous amount of misunderstanding, doled out to all who belong to a Christian state, provides sufficient inocula-

tion. The injection is all the more effective when accompanied by polished preaching, quiet hours in the churches, and Bible study. In such a society, the New Testament becomes the less known in proportion as it is reversed by the official Church and circulated by the Bible societies. So complete is the immunity that it is virtually impossible for anyone to become a Christian in Christendom. Those who explicitly repudiate Christ may retain their membership in the Church, while those who claim any direct revelation from God are likely to be ruled out of the Church. The demands levied by Jesus on his first followers have all been quietly cancelled. Their place has been taken by glib assent to formal creeds or nebulous, comfortable admiration for the human Jesus. In short, to be a Christian in Christendom is no more like being a Christian in the New Testament "than walking on one's legs is like walking on one's hands" (*Training in Christianity*, p. 207).

The claim of Christendom to be Christian is thus a forgery of the first order, and the chief culprits are the parsons and the professors. All the while parsons preach on "seeking first the kingdom of God," they are themselves seeking a wife and children, a prosperous parish, and public honors. Professing willingness to die for their faith, they take pains to see that such a sacrifice will not be necessary. Parasites and cannibals, they grow fat on the sacrifices of apostles and martyrs. Canny business men, they draw regular profit from dispensing the sacraments, and at the same time acquire a reputation for holiness which is denied other shopkeepers. The most admired teacher is one who secures the highest earthly honors as a true man of God. He gains this eminence by building the tombs of the prophets, thus gaining for himself the honor which belongs to those who suffer with Christ.

It was this successful deception which God commanded Kierkegaard to destroy. He must shout "Stop! Thief!" He must help blind people see through the deceits of Christendom, and having seen through them to get rid of them. To this end he broadcast this blunt proclamation:

Whoever you are my friend . . . by ceasing to take part in the public worship of God . . . as it now is . . . you have for ever one guilt, and a great one, the less. You do not take part in making a fool of God by calling a thing New-Testament Christianity which is not New-Testament Christianity. (*Attack Upon Christendom*, p. 59.)

What makes this attack so devastating? Several factors could be mentioned. It was instigated and directed by what to S. K. was an

inescapable divine commission. It sought above all to restore the imperious authority of Jesus Christ over His Church. It was not designed to provoke external reforms, to create a schism, or to launch a crusade. What S. K. demanded was the restoration of integrity. The initial price of integrity is simple honesty, nothing more and nothing less; the honesty of parsons who will admit publicly how far they themselves stand from the early martyrs, and how far the Church stands from New Testament Christianity. It was only after much inward struggle that S. K. had been brought to the point of attacking official Christianity so ruthlessly. It was by daily self-examination in the mirror of the Word that he tested his motivation, scrutinized his evasions, and patiently polished his weapons for this strange warfare. He came to see his whole life and authorship as intended by God as a preparation for this task. It was his loyalty to the church militant which gave such force to his assault on a church spuriously triumphant.

We must therefore scrutinize more closely his conception of true Christianity. He thinks of the Church as necessarily Christ-centered, since it is formed by the humiliated Christ drawing men to himself. By being drawn to Christ men are drawn away from worldliness. By its solidarity with Christ's mission, the Church becomes "a parenthesis in Christ's life." Its whole existence lies within this parenthesis, which begins with Christ's Ascension and ends with His Return (*Training in Christianity*, p. 198). During the entire span of its history, the true Church adopts Christ's life as its pattern, viewing every situation as His test of its faithfulness, and awaiting with fear and trembling His coming as Judge. This very anticipation of world's end is a mark of the Church's distance from worldliness. Its only goal is Christ's approval; friendship to the world is nothing less than enmity to God. So long as it endures in this world, it associates with Christ in His humiliation and incurs suffering with Him. Its love for Him is measured by its warfare against His enemies. It can truly survive only through maintaining this militancy. The promise that Hell's gates will never prevail against the Church holds absolutely true, but only so long as His followers continue His battle against the world. But where the disparity between Christ and the world has evaporated, there the gates of Hell have already prevailed. The gate to life for the Church as for every follower remains narrow; in fact its very narrowness is the Way. Where temporal hopes have become dominant, eternity can make its presence known only by the severity with which Christ deals with those whom He has called as followers. But the Church is to be viewed not simply in terms of individual followers; it is itself Christ's life on earth. Christendom, however, retains only enough of the true conception of the Church to make its forgery suc-

cessful. In fact, to the concept "Church" S. K. traces the fundamental confusion in both Protestantism and Catholics (*Attack Upon 'Christendom,'* p. 34).

It should not be surprising, therefore, that later critics have turned the tables by accusing him of holding a confused conception of the Church. And it is not difficult to support this accusation. There are major weaknesses in his doctrine of the Church. For example, he contends that fellowship is a lower category than the individual. (*Training in Christianity*, p. 218). How does this contention cohere with either the biblical doctrine of *koinonia* or the truths concerning the social structure of the individual self? Or again, consider S. K.'s dictum that "the fewer Christians the better" (*Attack Upon 'Christendom,'* p. 34). This may have merit as a prophetic protest against the false idea that the Church triumphs in proportion to its size and power, but it contradicts both the love of Jesus Christ for all, and the missionary passion of the apostles. To make ultimate, as S. K. seems to do, the distinctions between the solitary self and the corporate context of life, between personal history and community history, between the present instant and the past and future which together give that presentness its character, — this is to distort both the historical work of Christ and the inner contours of individual decision (cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 241f.).

In the current eagerness to refute S. K.'s concept of the Church, however, two errors should be avoided. First, we can easily allow our refutation to do the work of a guilty conscience, to become its means for evading the sharp thrust of his polemic where it cuts into our own flesh. What prophet has not had some abnormality which encouraged his hearers to shunt aside the sword of God's Word? Most criticisms of S. K. are quite incommensurable with the truth which remains after the justice of the criticism is allowed.

In the second place, we should not overlook the fact that it is exactly in the realm of Church-doctrine that Kierkegaard's work is today exerting a profound weight. In this area he was deficient; yet current discussions of ecclesiology betray a pervasive and increasing influence. I am thinking now of the tendencies during this past decade in ecumenical discussions. Let me pin-point some of the dominant motifs where the Kierkegaardian legacy is most easily detected.

First of all is the insistence upon a Christological definition of the Church. Jesus Christ retains "the crown rights" over His kingdom. Apart from Him nothing can rightly claim to be Church. And His judgment over the Church, whether now or in the last days, is to be recognized as valid in every situation. Because the true Church is

"Christ's life on earth" every Christological truth (e.g. the virgin birth, the ascension, the return) throws light upon the character and destiny of the Church.

The movement of thought from Christology to ecclesiology produces a new incentive for biblical exegesis and new questions for biblical theology. How, for example, does the New Testament deal with the way in which God's glory flows through Christ into the Church and the world?

The New Testament may not provide norms for the formal structure of the Church in all ages, but it may indicate what are the perennial logistics of Christ's warfare and the nuclear relationships between Christ and His people. The recovery of biblical theology is radically changing the basic concepts of the Church's unity and its mission.

One example of this is the wide recognition that the ministry of the Church is simply the continuing *ministry* of Jesus Christ. "The only valid ministry is that of the *Totus Christus* . . . The Christian ministry is no other than the ministry, the liturgy, of Christ Himself as he channels through preaching and sacrament, through forgiveness and healing, the continuous creation of the New World . . ." ¹ This means that to be the Church the Church must participate in the sufferings of Christ, whether those sufferings take the form of violent rejection by the world or deceptive adulation.

Where the ministry is conceived on the pattern of the Cross, it becomes necessary to conceive in the terms which S. K. discerned in the New Testament. The Church lives "between the times," looking backward to its inception in the ministry of Jesus and forward to its consummation in His cosmic victory. It is defined by its living memory and active anticipation. The "inner meaning of everything that the Church does . . . is a bringing into effective operation in the here and now of all that happened in Palestine, all that will happen at the Parousia." ² Contemporaneity with the Christ who has come and is coming provides the inner dynamic of every moment in Church history. Made free by His freedom, the Church becomes inwardly independent of cultural and political demands by repenting of its bondage and by receiving anew the Holy Spirit.

¹ J. A. T. Robinson, "Kingdom, Church and Ministry," *The Historic Episcopate in the Fulness of the Church*, ed. by Kenneth M. Carey (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1954), pp. 15, 13.

² *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.

Such repentance is quite empty unless it springs from that honesty which S. K. demanded as the initial requirement of Christendom. One hears responsible denominational leaders openly confessing that no denomination today has the right to consider itself a lineal descendant of the New Testament Church. Not few in number are the parsons and professors (no one can or should count noses) who locate the most dangerous idolatries within their own churches, their own schools, their own souls.

We are being aided toward this honesty by frequent and close contact with Christians from other traditions and continents. For some of our brothers, the deceptions of a complacent Christendom have been burned away by recent ordeals of fire. For some, contact with New Testament Christianity has come through close fellowship with tiny outposts of the Church in communist lands where strength is being perfected in weakness. Within Christendom itself (still as ambiguous a term as it was a century ago) there are single individuals who, in personal meetings with Christ, are restored to inner integrity, and who, simultaneously with a rediscovery of the self discover the mysterious existence of the Church, which is, in fact, the contemporary form of Christ's life and the mode of His ministry to the world, that very world which rejected Him and continues to seduce His followers by its deceptive offers of triumph. In these and many other ways, Christians today are heirs of the Dane who realized so keenly that the true Church is always militant in this age, and always triumphant in eternity.



A PASTOR LOOKS AT KIERKEGAARD

By WALLACE FORGEY

This paper has grown out of a reading of Kierkegaard during the busy and demanding days of a pastor. And such a reading grew out of something which happened at the close of a morning service. I had used a story by S. K. in my sermon, and much to my amazement and delight I discovered that several laymen were not only familiar with his name but they had also read some articles and book reviews having to do with his life and works. One layman expressed his enthusiasm by saying, "Kierkegaard was quite a guy." After an experience like that, no pastor could stop with a reading of "A Short Life of Kierkegaard" by Walter Lowrie; he just had to go on and read several books by S. K. himself; result — a depleted bank account, a growing shelf of books by S. K., and a deepening appreciation of one who saw in embryo form what was to become man's great problem in the twentieth century — the development of the mass mind and the devaluation of man as a person.

Søren Kierkegaard is really a preacher's author. W. H. Auden, in his little book "The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard" writes, "Though his writings are often brilliantly poetic and often deeply philosophic, Kierkegaard was neither a poet nor a philosopher, but a preacher, an expounder and defender of Christian doctrine and Christian conduct." That may be an exaggeration, but this is certainly true: S. K. had the faculty of seeing the sore spots of his day and generation, tried to do something about them in his thinking and writing, and had the courage to confront his generation with that which was truth for him, to pronounce judgment upon his church and his age, to face the tragedy of separation and loneliness, and to believe in the ultimate triumph of the things for which he lived and burned himself out, dying at the age of forty-two. Here is a man to know intimately. Here is meaty thought on which to chew. Here is a preacher who challenges one to use great themes. Here is a mind which is keen enough to cut through a pastor's complacency. Here is a life filled with divine discontent and passion. Here is a solution — a pastor's solution — to the problem faced by the "amorphous despairing mass of displaced persons and paralyzed Hamlets" who make up our modern world.

A good clue to the life and work of Søren Kierkegaard is to be found in the text of a sermon of his on "The Unchangeableness of God," said to be one of the last things published by him, although it was delivered in Copenhagen some four years previously: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of

lights, with whom can be no variation; neither shadow that is cast by turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures. Ye know this, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:17-21). This was S. K.'s favorite text — not only the basis of one of his last published sermons, but also of the first he ever wrote. Here is a clue to the rigorous demands which he made of his own life and the awful judgment which he pronounced on Christendom in general, his church in particular. It is also a clue to the simplicity of his gospel which is able to save unto the uttermost and in a simple act of faith — a leap of faith — enable one to pass from anxiety, anguish, despair and death to the glorious peace and power of eternal life.

Furthermore, a reading of Kierkegaard is absolutely necessary if one is to be at home in the writings of such authors as Ortega y Gasset, Marcel, Tillich, Buber, Heidegger, Jaspers, Niebuhr, Brunner and Barth, not forgetting Sartre, Orwell, Malraux and Canetti — all of whom stand in great debt to this 19th century Dane. Reinhold Niebuhr went so far as to call him "the profoundest interpreter of the psychology of the religious life, in my opinion, since Augustine." And H. A. Reinhold, writing in the *Commonweal*, a liberal Roman Catholic weekly, described S. K. as "the greatest Protestant Christian of the nineteenth century, a man equal in spiritual stature to Cardinal Newman." But Reinhold did not stop there; he went on to say, "He who is strong in faith will derive from him a mind-purging, clarifying experience which will make him understand something that catechism-taught Catholics so often forget: the uniqueness, the wholly otherness of the supernatural, the contingency of our man-furnished universe, the transcendence and holiness of God . . . Read him, and then turn to your Roman Missal." To move freely in the theological climate of today and to know the rock from which much of our modern theological thought was dug, we must know something of Søren Kierkegaard and his writings. If, for an understanding of much of our life today, it is important to know something of Karl Marx and Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, it is doubly important that we have a working knowledge of Kierkegaard.

Not that we will always agree with him. There will be times when we will see in him nothing but unreason — irrationality. But then we will turn a page and immediately feel ourselves in the presence of one who indulges in clear, philosophical thinking, a healthy

Biblicism and a down-to-earth existentialism. One moment we will turn away from him because his answers are too neat and shallow; the next we will turn back to him as a tortured soul torn by the tragedy of an individual trying to be a person in a society which saw man and treated man in the mass. At this particular point, we think he is somewhat petty, and at that, very wrong as he wrestles with Hegelianism, but as we stay with him and see Hegel through his eyes, we see S. K. struggling against and refusing to live in a neatly tied up world — in a block universe. He moves us deeply, sometimes to anger, as we read his attack upon Christendom and the church; but at other times he moves us to appreciation and gratitude when we listen to his pleas for a Christian life based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Read him — and get mad; read him — and fall on your knees that such a man lived and died in a serious attempt to awaken his generation to the things that matter most.

In order to appreciate Kierkegaard and his work, we must keep in mind at least three things:

1. First of all, S. K. and his writings must be seen against the social, economic, philosophic and religious background of his generation and his country. Both in Sweden and in Denmark there was a definite reaction against rational idealism; moreover, Danish thought was especially concerned to keep its philosophy very close to the world of personal experience. So S. K. rebelled against the philosophical idealism of his day — especially against Hegelianism, and not against just one or two particular points but against its whole attitude toward life and Christianity. Like William James, he refused to live in a neat little boxed universe. He was a tortured soul who could not bear to live within the system. He hated the smugness of system whether in philosophy or religion. He went to extremes in his denunciations. He screamed to high heaven with a strident voice. And in his own words he tells us why: "Had I said these things in ordinary tones, no one would have taken the least notice. I was obliged to speak at the top of my voice." He wanted philosophy to get down to life. He wanted to clothe it with flesh and blood.

2. Secondly, S. K. and his writings must be seen from the angle of an individualist. S. K. took himself as his point of departure. He believed not only in the subjectivity of truth but that "subjectivity is truth." Dr. Julius Seelye Bixler, in his book, *A Faith that Fulfills* tells us what Kierkegaard does not mean by that — and what he does mean. He does not mean that mind is the sole reality nor does he mean that man is the measure of all things nor that truth is merely subjectivity. Rather he means that "truth must be grasped by us in an

inner experience of appropriation". That is, you do not arrive at the reality of God by nicely worked-out abstract proofs after which you may write Q. E. D. You arrive at reality by appropriating it — by committing your life to it — by working it out in existence.

A good illustration of the above is to be found in "Preface to Christian Theology" by John Mackay and in "Meaning of Existence" by Leslie Paul where both these authors use the idea of the balcony and the road. You cannot discover the truth by sitting on the balcony admiring or criticizing what is going on — the human mind and spirit grappling with its problems. You must get down into the road: you must feel the world's divine discontent: you must make choices and sin and suffer and be pulled up short and take the leap of faith. Bixler reminds us that the essential point in S. K.'s teaching lies right here — "that words must be acted upon, beliefs must be experimented with emotionally, religious truth must be as he says 'reduplicated' or lived over again, put to work in action, and not allowed to become irrelevant to life." Truth is revealed in a man's struggle with life. It may be true that subjectivity is the truth only in the sense that it is the truth for that particular moment — for the time being and perhaps for that particular place. Quite so! But that moment of personal experience is a window looking out upon the world of reality. What is highest and deepest in ourselves is a revelation of what is highest and deepest in the world. The universal is known through the particular. God is known at the point of a man's moral and spiritual need and struggle.

3. Thirdly, S. K. and his writings must be approached with the same kind of reverence and trust with which we approach other great minds and philosophies. In spite of his faults and idiosyncrasies and exaggerations, he was one of the great thinkers of the nineteenth century. And until a greater than he appears on the horizon of the twentieth century, he does have something to say to our generation of (in the words of Auden) "despairing mass of displaced persons and paralyzed Hamlets." We need someone to pull us back to a new insight into the teachings of the New Testament. We need a clear voice to speak to the great (and ever enlarging) mass of people in our churches who have been not so much converted as adjusted — who think in terms of size and balanced budgets and attendance. We need someone to remind us that somewhere along the way Christians stopped following Christ but continued and continue to use his name.

Kierkegaard and his writings are not an end in themselves. Certainly they should never become a school of thought. He is a much-needed corrective. And it should be the business of Christians so to order their lives in Christ and so take him seriously in the church and

in the world that S. K. may become simply a mile-mark and a sign-post on the Christian way.

Four words may be used to sum up the message of Kierkegaard. Of course, there is much more to his message than can be expressed in these words but they do make plain to the ordinary person — the so-called man in the street — or pew — what S. K. was trying to say to his generation and would say to ours.

1. Truth. In S. K., truth is almost the equivalent of faith. Maybe Kierkegaard is a prophet of unreason — of the irrational, but I see reason taking him up to the place where there is a chasm. He is pulled up short with a jerk. He stands on the edge of an abyss. Now, in the words of William James, he must "will to believe." He must take the leap of faith. And then reason takes over again. At least it seems that way to me. Certainly no other writer has amassed so much material and argued so reasonably for the thing in which he believed. We may call it existential thinking, which is different from abstract speculation. It is whole-hearted, passionate dedication in faith to something which objectively to reason is speculatively uncertain but in the process of faith becomes certain. And what faith reveals to you becomes a revelation of the universal and the world of reality.

2. Choice. This has been called the central concept of S. K.'s philosophy. It is interpreted by many as an either-or decision between two ways of life. Really there is a "Choice" which is basic; and if the right choice is made one moves in a world of many choices. That is, one must choose to live in a world of choice where choice is possible. One must choose to live in a world where freedom is a necessity or in a world where necessity is a freedom. To choose the world where necessity is freedom is to live in a world where you are the helpless victim of your own freedom — a cork tossed on the waves of the sea. To choose the world where freedom is necessity is to live in a world where you have real freedom of choice — must accept that freedom by virtue of the fact that you have chosen to live in that kind of a world.

3. Existence. By the way, I have not come upon the word "existentialism" in any of S. K.'s writings. But that seems perfectly logical because the one thing he feared was that those coming after him would work him over and develop a system. The German word "Existenz" used in the translation of Kierkegaard is not at all the same as our word "existence." "Existenz" is the property only of human beings. Bixler tells us that it is "the experience of the Christian believer as he develops his spiritual powers, faces crises, makes decisions, and summons his whole personality to meet the demands of

faith." H. R. Mackintosh says that "existential thinking is the kind of thinking which accompanies the coming-to-be of 'existence.' It is realized through the inner decisions of the individual, who thereby comes in touch with reality at its deepest. It is a mode of thought which concerns not the intellect merely but the whole personality of the man who awakens to it and adopts it. To think existentially, therefore, is to think not as a spectator of the ultimate issues of life and death, but as one who is committed to a decision upon them." A simpler way to think of it is to see the difference between merely existing and really living. Sometimes we say a person is not living — not really living — merely existing until he has a certain experience. So S. K. would say that you really do not have life in the sense of your whole personality coming alive until you "think existentially" and by faith put your thinking into practice. God is not a lifeless category for whom we may seek proofs but rather a transcendent God to believe in and appropriate and live with.

4. God. Here one arrives at the goal of all our choices — the end for which the leaps were made — the culmination of all our thinking and living — the knowledge of God. And while to Otto and Barth God has become the wholly other, to S. K. God is not merely the transcendent God but the imminent God with whom one may have communion. There is a great gap between God and man — but faith can bridge the gap. And in doing so, the life of the individual is not obliterated but enhanced, enriched and enlarged. More than that, faith in God gives one the universal. While the truth which I experience through individual and personal faith is truth for me, nevertheless it reveals to me a portion of universal truth. What at first seems purely subjective becomes objective. Having left the reasonable and rational for a time, forced by the jerk of experience, I accept the absurd — the unreasonable, that which is both foolishness and a stumbling block — I take the leap of faith and find myself living a life which once again seems reasonable. I believe that S. K. is a mystic who knew by experience a real union with God that neither obliterated the individual nor the objective world of reality. In the experience of God, they were one. And what has been called irrational and unreason was gathered up into a larger unity or whole. A better word to use would be supra-rational. But to S. K. it was just life.



The author of the preceding article suggests the following list of books for those who desire to read further:

Lowrie, Walter, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942. A brief, very readable, informative biography.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *Fear and Trembling*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940. An important little book which contains most, if not all, of the distinctive elements in S. K.'s thought. Also published by Doubleday and Company in an excellent 85 cent ed.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *Purity of Heart*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938. A devotional book — "Spiritual Preparation for the Feast of Confession" — with a good introductory essay by Douglas V. Steere.

Bretall, Robert, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946. A chronological arrangement of selections from S. K.'s works, thus revealing S. K.'s intellectual and spiritual growth.

Auden, W. H., *Kierkegaard*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1952. With a brief introductory message by Auden who sees S. K. as a preacher.

Martin, H. V., *Kierkegaard the Melancholy Dane*. New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950. A not too critical but appreciative study of S. K.'s works which met a real need in the life of the compiler of this list.

Allen, E. L., *Kierkegaard; His Life and Thought*. London: Stanley Nott, Ltd., 1935. A brief, critical study which is excellent in the light of the time in which it was written.

Thomte, Reidar, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948. An exposition of the basic concepts of S. K.'s religious philosophy, with a sincere effort to let S. K. have his own say; hence, copious quotations and references.

Thilly, Frank, and Wood, Ledger, *A History of Philosophy*; rev. ed. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951. Chapter XX, "Reaction against Rationalism and Idealism." This chapter puts S. K. in proper perspective in history.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Works of Love*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946. A presentation of neighbor-love as both demanding and relevant.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *Attack Upon "Christendom."* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944. Strong meat, to be taken after reading earlier works by S. K.

Swenson, David, *Something about Kierkegaard*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945. A number of papers that deal with various aspects of S. K. in a very appreciative way.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939. Said to be a key to S. K.'s work up to 1849.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Present Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1940. Gives S. K.'s life and mission in its historical setting.

Haecker, Theodor, *Søren Kierkegaard*; tr. by Alexander Dru. New York: Oxford University Press, 1937. A lecture and an essay by a German Protestant theologian dealing with S. K.'s relevance for thinkers of his day.



